



Academic Dispatch

March 12, 2020

Protecting the Pack

It is a difficult time for all of the UNM community. We are experiencing fear, doubt, and anxiety. The invisible virus, SARS-Cov-2, and the disease it causes, COVID-19, has spread around the world. And while most of us are in little danger of a poor outcome even if we should contract it, too many of our New Mexico neighbors – those who are older, those who are immunosuppressed, those with some chronic health challenges – are threatened.

We must take action to protect our most susceptible community members. The transmission of this virus is currently one of exponential growth, and we are early in the pandemic stage. We can mitigate and greatly minimize harm to our susceptible community members if we implement what public health experts call containment. Vulnerable populations infected by this virus can require complex hospital care. If we control the rate of exposure and slow the growth of the infected population, we “flatten the curve” and can ease the burden on vulnerable populations.

Our experts tell us that our window of opportunity to implement containment steps remains open. But if we pursue business as usual, we will not be able to flatten the curve and the mortality rate in those vulnerable populations could increase.

At the same time, both the present and the futures of our students depend on UNM. Some are at financial risk, and their ability to complete a college degree is delicate and easily derailed, too often forever. For many, we are their only provider of room and board, of health care, and of employment. While a few universities around the country are closing, this course can cause harm that may even be irreparable. In consultation with UNM experts on health, with UNM academic leadership, and with input from other academic institutions, we are launching a strategy to continue educational activities while also contributing to a national goal to reduce the rate of transmission and infection from this virus.

We ask that all Lobos keep an eye open for email communications from UNM about the evolving situation. Also check the website <http://www.unm.edu/coronavirus> on which we will keep up-to-date on our actions and guidelines on mitigating the virus' impact on our New Mexico community.

At present expect to continue classes after break, March 23, 2020, although there may be some changes in learning modalities for some of our classes. We are beginning to identify the most important courses to move from high-presence, face-to-face instruction, to lower-presence hybrid or online modalities. The

goal is not necessarily to eliminate all in-presence instruction, but to reduce contact and hence minimize the probability of viral transmission in the educational environment. We have asked faculty to begin thinking about how they would modify their own instruction to reduce high-presence instructional environments in favor of those with lower density.

We recognize that some important forms of instruction might be inherently high-presence, for example clinical rotations, teaching internships, studio art classes, or laboratory courses. Using both our own creative community, and with ideas from other institutions, we are developing options to reduce the probability of transmission in these environments while allowing students to continue to progress.

Your health and wellbeing matter. Most of us are at low risk relative to COVID-19, but some among us may have a suppressed immune system, or a respiratory problem, or other health condition that puts us at greater risk. Get enough sleep, practice the other habits of good health, and stay home if you are sick.

This world-wide public health challenge is evolving in a dynamic and complex way. It will vex us in new ways each day. This is the time to come together with good humor, good will, and good grace. Each of us will define all of us.

James Paul Holloway

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